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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE GREATER PERIL

SIR,—The interesting exposition of the state of public feeling in England toward America and Americans contained in your January number, whets one's appetite for a psychological study of both peoples in this crisis of civilization. Perhaps we can look forward to such a paper in one of your ensuing issues.

The English attitude, that the Allies are fighting our battle while we are fattening on the conflict, can readily be attributed to the intense egoism of people engaged in an undertaking which absorbs the supreme measure of thought and energy of which they are capable. England and her Allies did not embark on this struggle from any altruistic motive, and it is safe to say that until they were committed to the war no thought of its effect on America ever entered their minds. Later, however, appalled by the magnitude of the sacrifices which they were called upon to make and realizing that a country which stood for the same ideals remained unscathed, they, in protest against the seeming injustice of it, cried out, "Why not you, too? Our cause is also the cause of civilization and democracy; why, then, should you stand aloof?"

In claiming our active participation in the war at that time England was clearly unreasonable. Our population contains a strong leaven of Teutonic blood, and our Government is a representative one. Germany had given us no cause for quarrel; and that we should take sides against her without direct provocation was morally impossible. "But what of the violation of Belgium?" it is urged. Even in this we were not officially concerned, for no convention or treaty to which America was a party had been broken, although gross and shameful wrong had certainly been done, and we knew it. Public opinion in this country resented the act, and while our Government still had no excuse for hostilities, good cause existed for a distinct bias toward the Allies, which might have taken the form of a technical neutrality with thinly disguised sympathy for the Powers that were fighting for Belgian deliverance. This position was not taken, however, and England was reasonable in her disappointment and criticism.

This leads us to the psychological study of the individual. Why was this attitude not assumed by our Government? At that time it was a safe one politically, and could have been made popular. The policy of the Administration was entirely directed by the President. Mr. Wilson, therefore, may be held individually responsible for what ensued. Can the reason for his attitude be found in a narrow conception of his duty to the nation of which he was the Chief Executive, or may it be looked for in an ambition to avoid war during a period in the world's history when war was almost universal?

Whatever the President's motive, the Teutonic Powers had begun to take

his measure, and when outrages were later committed against the lives and property of American citizens at sea, it was on the fair chance that such outrages would not be actively resented by this Government. That presumption has been amply justified, and further activities were inaugurated. The German-American population of this country was incited to subordinate its American citizenship to an allegiance claimed by the land of its birth, conspiracies against industrial properties were instigated by the diplomatic and consular representatives of the Teutonic Allies, and a flagrant pro-German propaganda was developed among us. Truly a miscarriage of England's just hope of gaining at least our *moral* support!

What was the attitude of our people through all this—not of the foreigners recently admitted to citizenship, but of the American people? Aghast, at first, at the magnitude of the calamity, immediately concerned for their own financial and commercial stability, horrified at the great Germanic crime with which the war was ushered in; and then, what? Influenced somewhat by willingness to follow lines of least resistance and somewhat by an orderly desire to support the Government in any course it might pursue, we were indignant but inactive. The newspapers promised us, at each outrage, that Germany would be held to a "strict accountability," and that each culmination of the Administration, if unheeded, would be followed by portentous doings of some kind. We waited, but nothing followed except some insolently evasive reply by the Power to which our protest was, for the moment, addressed.

Meantime we were becoming accustomed to outrages; they did not seem to interfere with business—which was becoming good again—and very few of us knew personally any of the victims. The more we read of the conduct of modern war, the more undesirable war seemed to be; we had never fought Germany, and therefore had no traditional antagonism toward her. She was not "in sight" on land or sea, and seemed rather intangible as a possible enemy. There was no obvious way of attacking her, and there was nothing in the idea to stir the blood. Beside, the Administration was constantly receiving assurances that the outrages complained of would not be repeated. We gradually became callous and indifferent, our ethical standards were rapidly lowered by familiarity with unpunished crimes, and our moral sense became blunted. A sorry condition, indeed, and one that justifies England's present opinion of us. She is disappointed, and justly so, and our own people abroad, who through their individual activities are upholding the traditions of American manhood and womanhood, are bitterly ashamed. This is bad enough, God knows, but is worse to come?

England and her Allies control the seas, and, in the prosecution of the war, enforce certain trade restrictions against neutral commerce with her enemies. Contrary to *our* views of what she ought to do under the circumstances, she has, for instance, declared cotton contraband of war. This touches our pockets, as we would like to sell cotton to Germany; so we protest. We encounter other restrictions and inconveniences, and we protest again. We have a subconscious feeling that we have been bullied by Germany and we do not propose to be bullied by England (who, by the way, shows no disposition to bully us), and the language of our protest is rather harsher than that employed in notes to Germany over the murder of our citizens. A commercial grievance we can understand, and, properly handled, it would be a good vote-getter; so it is ventilated in Congress, and certain

sections of the country are lashed into greater indignation by the fiery eloquence of their representatives. England, so far, has replied to our protests with unflinching courtesy and patience, but should she for a moment lose her self-control over the relatively grotesque situation and send this Government a sharp reply, it would be perfectly possible for the altercation to grow into a dispute the consequences of which would be difficult to foresee. Antagonism to England is traditional with us; we are taught it in the public schools; in the period of our national life our only real and persistent enemy has been England, whom we have always conquered. This, at least, is the schoolboy's creed, and a shadowy belief in the truth of it lingers in the man's mind. Is it possible for this antagonism again to burst forth? Unthinkable as it may seem, I believe it is, although with equal conviction I believe that no provocation short of an attack would induce England to fight us. Still we may easily go so far as definitely to lose her friendship; and to her friendship we already owe much. Does our only hope of avoiding such a calamity lie in a change of Administration?

H. C. GROOME.

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FROM A DISHEARTENED PATRIOT

SIR,—I read with the deepest interest your article, "England Today," in the January number of the REVIEW. It must have attracted thoughtful attention everywhere, and I happen to know of one case in which the reading of it, by a friend of mine, led to the buying of a dozen copies of the REVIEW in less than a day. Living summers, as we do, in Canada, where the feelings excited by the war are like those in England, and almost as strong, we can understand and appreciate your article better than any one can who has lived all the time within our own boundaries. We, too, have felt as the Americans in England do, while we have watched the course of our Government; and in a letter that I wrote from Canada to a friend in New York, after the President made his "too proud to fight" speech, I said that if the Administration continued to follow the course that it was then pursuing, I thought I should renounce my American birthright and become a naturalized citizen of the country where I was already living more than half of every year. I haven't done it yet, but it still remains a possibility. Meanwhile, by lecturing in Canada for the benefit of every patriotic object, from the Patriotic Fund and the Red Cross to the purchase of machine guns, I suppose I have joined the ranks of the "residents abroad who, although born and bred in the United States, have so far forgotten themselves and their honor as citizens as to put their passionate sympathy with one or the other side in the great European conflict above their regard for the peace and dignity of the United States."

But I would say to President Wilson, as a very distinguished American said in the Virginia Convention, a century and a half ago, "If this be treason, make the most of it."

I am more afraid, just now, that we shall incur the enmity of England, by nagging her on the subject of interference with our trade, than I am that we shall get into trouble with Germany. The creation of a hostile and bitter feeling toward us in England and Canada would be a greater calamity than a rupture of diplomatic relations with the Central European Powers could ever be.